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ABSTRACT

Although most people are occasionally lonely, others find loneliness to be an enduring problem. Loneliness is often associated with a variety of personality characteristics which interfere with the formation of interpersonal relationships. The interrelationship of shyness and loneliness over time and in response to varying situations was examined in 2 studies. Undergraduates (N=76) enrolled in large lecture courses completed the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Social Reticence Scale at the beginning and end of a 10-week interval. Undergraduates (N=50) enrolled in small experiential courses designed to enhance interpersonal effectiveness completed the same instruments with an elapsed interval of 7 weeks. In the lecture group, loneliness significantly increased over time, whereas shyness remained stable. Results indicated that shyness was causally linked to the increase in loneliness. Students in the experiential group showed a significant decrease in both shyness and loneliness. Findings suggest that the experiential nature of the classes may require students to surmount their social reticence, because data reveal that the shy subjects exhibited a significant decrease in loneliness. (Author/NRB)

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LONELINESS AND SHYNESS:
Two Longitudinal Studies

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association, Houston, TX, April 16-18, 1981.

Loneliness and Shyness: Two Longitudinal Studies[1]

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Empirical studies have shown that most people are occasionally lonely, often in response to such situational changes as moving, the death of a loved one, or divorce. However, many others find loneliness to be an enduring problem. For these latter individuals, loneliness persists despite the availability of social contacts and is accompanied by a constellation of negative self-perceptions. Loneliness has been found to be associated with a variety of personality characteristics which would interfere with the formation of interpersonal relationships. These tendencies include introversion, social anxiety, sensitivity to rejection, public self-consciousness, and diminished social risk-taking (Cutrona, in press; Jones, Freemon, & Goswick, in press).

One of the more consistent findings in the literature is that lonely people also describe themselves as being shy (Jones, et al., in press; Zimbardo, 1977). Shyness may be conceptualized as a group of related emotions and attitudes which act to inhibit an individual's sociability, particularly in novel or unfamiliar situations. To the extent that the anxiety engendered by shyness is manifest in behavior, the individual will be less likely to initiate or intensify contacts with others. Thus, shyness may serve a causative function in the onset and maintenance of loneliness.

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[1]Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association, Houston, April 1981.

In an investigation of the influence of shyness on loneliness, Cheek and Busch (in press) classified students as either "shy" or "unshy" on the basis of a trait measure of shyness at the beginning of a spring semester. Loneliness scores were also obtained at that time and, again, near the end of the semester. The authors found that whereas all subjects reported a decrease in loneliness over time, the decline was significant only for the shy group. It was further observed that the shy students remained significantly more lonely at the second time of testing than did those who were not shy. Cheek and Busch interpreted their results as representing an interaction between situational and dispositional factors.

The following studies were also designed to explore the interrelationship of shyness and loneliness. Of particular interest were the manifestation of both shyness and loneliness over time and, additionally, the influence of varying situations.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for Studies 1 and 2 were drawn from students enrolled in courses with contrasting formats. In Study 1, 30 male and 46 female undergraduates were enrolled in large lecture-style courses which necessitated a minimum of student interaction. Subjects in Study 2, 23 men and 27 women, were enrolled in small sections of a lower-division course in human relations. The latter course was experiential in nature, using guided-discussion, role-playing, and sensitivity exercises to encourage personal insights and interpersonal effectiveness. All subjects received nominal course credit for their participation.

Procedure

In both Study 1 and Study 2, the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Social Reticence Scale were administered in class as part of larger questionnaires. The Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978) is a 20-item instrument on which subjects indicate the frequency with which they experience a variety of perceptions and emotions theoretically related to loneliness. Responses are scored on a 4-point scale ranging from "often" to "never" and are summed to yield a single score. The scale in internally consistent, producing alpha coefficients of from .89 to .94 in several samples. Test-retest correlations of loneliness scores have ranged from .62 over a 7-month period to .73 for an interval of 2 months. Construct validity has been demonstrated by a correlation of .79 between loneliness scores and a single item self-rating of loneliness and by a 2-standard deviation difference in scores obtained from students who were self-referred to a loneliness clinic as compared with scores from the general campus population. Loneliness scores have been found to correlate highly with such related emotions as depression and dissatisfaction, and to be uncorrelated with conceptually distinct feelings, thus providing some support for the scale's discriminant validity.

The Social Reticence Scale (Jones & Russell, 1981) is a 22-item measure designed to reflect the problem areas described by Zimbardo (1977) in his discussion of shyness. Subjects respond to the items (e.g., "I am very self-conscious" and "Most people don't know shat I'm really like") on a 5-point scale ranging from "very typical of me" to "very untypical." Item responses are summed to

yield a total shyness score. Internal consistency of the scale has been demonstrated by a coefficient alpha and split-half reliability of .91, and by significant item-whole correlations. Criterion validity has been exemplified through significant correlations between scale scores and a single self-labeling item, a nine-item shyness measure (Cheek & Busch, in press), and behavioral indices of shyness.

All subjects completed the scales twice during the semester. For Study 1, a 10-week interval separated the first and second administrations. In Study 2, data were collected at the beginning and end of a period of seven weeks.

Results

Preliminary t-tests found no gender differences in loneliness or shyness for either study, therefore, data from male and female subjects were combined for further analyses. Similarly, t-tests failed to detect differences on either variable between subjects in Study 1 and those in Study 2, thus allowing a comparison of the results.

For both sets of data, the following analyses were performed. First, dependent t-tests were used to determine the significance of changes in loneliness and shyness scores over time. Second, a cross-lagged panel correlational analysis was employed to demonstrate the strength of the relationships among the variables. According to Cook and Campbell (1979), cross-lagged panel correlations may be used in passive observational settings where two or more variables are measured on the same individuals on two or more occasions. Interpretability of the results is maximal when the synchronous

correlations remain stable. The final analysis involved examining changes in loneliness scores as a function of initial shyness.

The results of Study 1 will be considered first. Mean loneliness and shyness scores for each administration are presented in Table 1. Loneliness scores significantly increased over the 10-week interval (t (75) = -4.86, $p < .0001$), whereas shyness reamined relatively stable (t (75) = -1.66, $p > .05$). In the cross-lagged panel correlations for Study 1 (see Figure 1), the correlation between initial shyness and subsequent loneliness (the descending diagonal) was greater than that between the first loneliness scores and later shyness scores (the ascending diagonal). A test of the difference in magnitude of these correlations was significant (t (73) = 3.70, $p < .001$). It was also observed that the synchronous correlations, those on the vertical legs of the figure, were nearly equal. The pattern of these relationships suggest that shyness is more strongly implicated in the experience of loneliness than vice versa.

In the final analysis for Study 1, subjects were divided into "shy" and "unshy" groups on the basis of a median split of initial shyness scores. Dependent t-tests were then calculated on changes in loneliness scores for each group (see Table 2). A significant increase in loneliness occurred across subjects, regardless of whether they were originally shy (t (36) = -4.36, $p < .0001$) or not (t (38) = -2.68, $p < .01$). The lack of a differential time effect further substantiates the strong relationship between shyness and loneliness.

Study 2 presented a different pattern of results. Both lone-

liness and shyness significantly decreased over time (loneliness: t (49) = 2.80, $p < .007$; shyness: t (49) = 3.07, $p < .004$). These data are presented in Table 1. In further contrast to Study 1, the cross-lagged panel correlations (Figure 1) fail to suggest the influence of shyness on loneliness that was previously observed. Although the synchronous correlations are, again, equivalent, the diagonal correlations are also of a similar magnitude.

A possible explanation for these discrepane results may be drawn from Table 2. "Shy" and "unshy" subjects differentially experienced changes in loneliness over the seven-week interval. Subjects who were not shy at the beginning of the study reported similar levels of loneliness at both times of measurement (t (24) = 1.29, $p > .05$), whereas initially shy subjects showed a decrease in loneliness over time (t (24) = 2.60, $p < .02$). This variation in subject groups would result in a weakening of the relationship between shyness at Time 1 and loneliness at Time 2.

Discussion

As in previous research, the present studies found substantial correlations between loneliness and shyness. However, other results were divergent. The increase in loneliness scores in Study 1 is inconsistent with data reported by Cheek and Busch (in press) and by Cutrona (in press) in their longitudinal studies of college students. Although Cutrona observed a significant decrease in loneliness from the second week of the academic year to the seventh week, a more marked reduction was noted from the seventh week to the end of the spring semester. In a cross-sectional study of Canadian college students, Ross (1979) also found a decline in

loneliness scores from the beginning to the end of the academic year, but a small, statistically insignificant increase in loneliness by the eleventh week of the fall semester (the time at which Study 1 was conducted). Regional and/or institutional variation may account for this diversity.

Of more immediate interest is the differential outcomes of Studies 1 and 2. Although the two samples were comparable in both loneliness and shyness when initially measured, one group displayed stable shyness scores and an increase in loneliness over time, whereas the other group was observed to decline on both variables. These results may be interpreted with reference to attribution theory and a social competence model of loneliness.

Peplau and her colleagues (see Peplau & Perlman, 1979) have proposed an attributional theory of loneliness in which the chronicity of the experience is related to its perceived stability and locus of causality. Individuals who view loneliness as the result of stable, internal factors are more likely to feel depressed and to have lower expectations for the future. In support of this position, the subjects in Cutrona's study who remained lonely at the end of the school year attributed their initial loneliness to personal characteristics (e.g., shyness and fear of rejection), whereas subjects whose loneliness was transient initially made attributions that were both situational and personal.

Jones (in press) has recently suggested that problems in relating effectively to others, whether because of unacquired skill, restricted experience, or interpersonal anxiety, may predispose an individual to loneliness and act to maintain that condition. The

social reticence of the shy person would hamper the establishment of satisfying interpersonal relationships. Also, if the person perceived his or her shyness as a stable, dispositional characteristic, attribution theory would predict loneliness to be a relatively chronic experience.

Subjects in Study 1 received no systematic behavioral intervention and their shyness scores were consistent over time. However, those in Study 2 were enrolled in classes that were designed expressly for the purpose of increasing interpersonal effectiveness. Through in-class exercises these subjects were required to alter their typical patterns of interacting and, subsequently, became less shy. The initially shy subjects, perhaps because of increased social skill and/or a change in their perception of shyness as a stable characteristic, also became less lonely.

These results lend further credance for the proposition that shyness is causally implicated in the perpetuation of loneliness. Because shyness has both subjective and behavioral manifestations, its alleviation would allow the individual to become more comfortable in the presence of others and more amenable to rewarding social exchange. The present studies suggest that training in social skills may provide the vehicle by which this may be accomplished.

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Table 1

Analyses of Changes in Loneliness and Shyness

	Study 1		Study 2	
	Loneliness	Shyness	Loneliness	Shyness
Time 1	39.34	52.45	42.44	57.02
Time 2	43.30	54.05	39.40	53.48
t	-4.87**	-1.66	2.80*	3.07*

*p < .01
**p < .0001

Table 2

Change in Loneliness Scores as a Function of Ititial Shyness

	Study 1		Study 2	
	Shy	Unshy	Shy	Unshy
Time 1	44.18	33.97	48.52	36.36
Time 2	47.72	36.64	44.64	34.16
t	-4.36***	*2.68**	2.60*	1.39

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .0001

Figure 1

Two Cross-Lagged Panel Correlations Between Shyness (S) and Loneliness (L) at Time 1 and Time 2